

WASHINGTON—Yesterday, Congressman Joe Sestak (D-PA) voted for passage of the Orderly and Responsible Iraq Redeployment Appropriations Act of 2008 (H.R. 4156), and issued the following statement: — “Earlier this year, I submitted the Bipartisan Resolution for Iraq (H.R. 3863), with a comprehensive strategic approach for a bipartisan way ahead in Iraq. I believe that ending the war in Iraq is necessary. But how we end it is of even greater importance for both our security and our troops’ safety.

On November 14, I voted for the Orderly and Responsible Iraq Redeployment Appropriations Act (H.R. 4156) because the legislation had key elements that were part of the bi-partisan legislation I submitted to bring a comprehensive approach to ending the War in Iraq.

Over the past weeks, I met with House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Majority Leader Steny Hoyer, among others, on a number of occasions to emphasize the need to begin redeployment of our troops from Iraq as soon as possible or to face the risk of the Army rapidly unraveling with acceleration.

The key elements in the bill included:

- 1) Beginning re-deployment of our troops from Iraq within 30 days of the law’s enactment
- 2) Including a goal, rather than ‘a date certain’, for completion of redeployment by December 15, 2008—which would be more attractive to more Republicans. While this is different from the 15 to 24 months that my bill stated it would take in order to redeploy our troops safely, I could support it after discussions with the leadership that they recognize it will take 15 to 24 months to complete and, therefore, the December date is a “goal,” not a “date certain.”
- 3) A diplomatic approach for political accommodation in Iraq, by requiring the President to

submit to Congress a comprehensive regional stability plan for the Middle East, which shall include a military, diplomatic, political and economic strategy that provides for the national security interests of the United States in the region and for the engagement of targeted counterterrorism operations

4) Plans to change the mission of U.S. forces in Iraq from primarily combat to a mission that focuses on diplomatic efforts, some limited support to Iraqi security forces (only if they appear to be doing their job), targeted counterterrorism operations, and no permanent bases in Iraq.

I am comfortable with supporting the four months of full funding for our troops in the Emergency Supplemental Bill, and then ensuring the President follows the legislation (if passed) before appropriating further funding. If the bill fails to become law, I also ensured in discussions with General Cartright, Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, that there is sufficient funding for the Army until mid-February (although some funds would have to be moved within the Department of Defense). I am comfortable with this since I oversaw the Navy's \$70 billion warfare programs and know some defense funds are fungible and can be moved quite readily to meet the needs of our troops for a limited period of time. Moreover, I have the assurance from the House Leadership, including Defense Appropriations Chairman John Murtha, that no matter what, we will ensure that even if this bill fails, emergency funding will be provided in an Emergency Supplemental Appropriations bill before mid-February to ensure our troops will have funding for their needs.

While fighting a war is dangerous, it is not meant to be unsafe by not supplying our troops with sufficient resources and funds they need to end the war safely. I would never vote to put those men and women serving in nation in harm's way, without all the resources and funding they need until a proper resolution to the War in Iraq is reached.

That said, while there are key elements within the legislation that I voted for that represent what was in my bill, it still lacked a complete comprehensive strategic approach that could also be supported by Republicans for a veto proof majority.

My concern with this current legislation--and why I initially voted to oppose two procedural motions to bring it to a vote--is that it did not go far enough to ensure that both Democrats and Republicans would support the bill by their having had the opportunity to sit together to negotiate a plan supported by a veto-proof majority. This more complete plan would appropriately fund the war, and set a goal and timetable for re-deployment, including a definitive

mandatory requirement for our military to reach pre-surge level by July 2008.

As I had expressed in my Iraq bi-partisan bill, moving 160,000 troops and 50,000 civilian contractors and closing bases, are logistically challenging, especially in conflict. To ensure our troops' safety, it will take at least a year ...probably 15 to 24 months. The "long pole in the tent" is the closure or turnover of 65 Forward Operating Bases (FOBs). Conservatively, it takes 100 days to close one FOB. Redeployment is the most vulnerable of military operations, particularly because this one will be down a single road, leading from Iraq to Kuwait – "Road Tampa." Such vulnerability is why, in 1993, after "Blackhawk Down" in Somalia it took six months to extract our 6,300 troops safely, and only then after inserting another 19,000 to protect their redeployment.

I believe that Democrats must help author such a comprehensive regional security plan that accepts the necessity for a deliberate redeployment. In turn, the Republicans must accept that the U.S. government must also work diplomatically with Iran and Syria during this deliberate redeployment. While these two countries are currently involved destructively in this war, according to our intelligence community, these nations want stability in Iraq after our departure and, therefore, can play a constructive role.

However, I supported this bill because it contains critical elements that are necessary to ending the War in Iraq. And while I will continue to ensure the importance of funding for the troops while in combat with the House Leadership, Speaker Pelosi, Majority Leader Hoyer, House Armed Services Chairman Skelton, Chairman Murtha, and Caucus Chairman Emanuel, I will also continue to work for what is of critical importance: a comprehensive strategic approach that is necessary to bringing an end to the War in Iraq, with a stable accommodation within that country as part of that strategy. "

Born and raised in Delaware County, former 3-star Admiral Joe Sestak served in the Navy for 31 years and now serves as the Representative from the 7th District of Pennsylvania. He led a series of operational commands at sea, including Commander of an aircraft carrier battle group of 30 U.S. and allied ships with over 15,000 sailors and 100 aircraft that conducted operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. After 9/11, Joe was the first Director of "Deep Blue," the Navy's anti-terrorism unit that established strategic and operations policies for the "Global War on Terrorism." He served as President Clinton's Director for Defense Policy at the National Security Council in the White House, and holds a Ph.D. in Political Economy and Government from

Harvard University. According to the office of the House Historian, Joe is the highest-ranking former military officer ever elected to the U.S. House of Representatives.